

City of Blair 5th Tuesday Special Council Meeting
March 31, 2026

The Mayor and City Council met in special session for the 5th Tuesday meeting in the City Council Chambers on March 31, 2026, at 6:00 PM. The following were present: Gary Banner, Brent Clark, Kirk Highfill, Kent Long, Frank Wolff. Absent: James Letcher, Rick Paulsen, and Kevin Willis. Also present were City Administrator Green, Deputy City Administrator Barrow, Deputy City Administrator Heaton, Deputy City Administrator Scott, City Attorney Talbot, Library Director Lukert, Finance Director/Treasurer Bach, Community Development Director Beiermann, IT Director White, Public Safety & Communications Coordinator Dunn, and Police Chief Kinsey.

The Mayor publicly stated to all in attendance that a current copy of the Nebraska Open Meetings Act was available for review and indicated the location of such copy posted in the room where the meeting was being held. Notice of the meeting was given in advance thereof by publication in the Enterprise or the Pilot -Tribune as shown by the affidavit of publication filed in the City Clerk's office. Notice of the meeting was simultaneously given to the Mayor and all members of the City Council, and a copy of their acknowledgement of receipt of notice and the agenda is filed in the City Clerk's office. Availability of the agenda was communicated in the advance notice and in the notice to the Mayor and Council of this meeting. All proceedings hereafter shown were taken while the convened meeting was open to the attendance of the public.

Agenda Item #1, #2, & #3 – Mayor Rump called the meeting to order at 7:00 p.m. followed by roll call and the Pledge of Allegiance.

Agenda Item #4 – Consent agenda approved the following: 4a) Approval of Minutes of the March 24, 2026, meeting. Motion by Frank Wolff, second by Kirk Highfill to approve the Consent Agenda. Council members voted as follows: Gary Banner: Yea, Brent Clark: Yea, Kirk Highfill: Yea, James Letcher: Absent, Kent Long: Yea, Rick Paulsen: Absent, Kevin Willis: Absent, Frank Wolff: Yea. All Council members voted: Yea: 5, Nay: 0, Absent: 3. Mayor Rump declared the motion carried.

City Administrator Green updated the public on the meeting process, noting that this is one of the most important decisions the City will make. Nine proposals were originally submitted and were narrowed down by staff to three finalists presenting this evening. Each presenter will have 45 minutes, followed by 15 minutes for questions. No decision will be made tonight; the matter will be returned to the City Council on April 14. Administrator Green also thanked the local radio stations for recording the meeting so it can be viewed by the public.

Agenda Item #5. Proposal Presentation for City of Blair Comprehensive Plan by Confluence, 1111 N. 13th Street, Suite 203, Omaha, Nebraska 68102. The consulting firm Confluence presented its qualifications, project understanding, and proposed approach for preparing the City of Blair's Comprehensive Plan. The project team was introduced, including Caitlin Bolte (Principal-in-Charge/Project Manager) and Christopher Shires (Principal Planner). They are also supported by Houston Engineering, Inc., Ray Planning Solutions, LLC, and ETC Institute. The team summarized Blair's context and key planning considerations, noting: 1) Blair's proximity to Omaha and a significant share of its workforce living locally, 2) Major employers including the Cargill/Novozymes campus supporting over 1,100 industrial jobs, high traffic volumes on Washington Street (10,000+ vehicles/day), 3) Housing demand, 4) Aging utility systems and alignment needs with SS4A safety improvements, and the importance of coordinated land-use growth management and infrastructure investment. Confluence
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outlined a four-phase, 14-month process: 1) Research & Analysis – data gathering, branding, existing conditions review, and early workshops; 2) Public & Stakeholder Engagement – visioning workshops, downtown charrette, focus groups, interviews, and online engagement, 3) Draft Plan & Evaluation – land use scenarios, steering committee reviews, public open house, and formal review periods; 4) Final Plan & Adoption – public hearings with Planning Commission and City Council. Confluence emphasized a strong analytical foundation including workforce and commuter pattern analysis, housing tenure and population trend review, coordination with local and regional economic organizations, GIS and physical profile analysis, use of Placer.ai for real-time visitor, retail, and activity pattern data. The team described its partnership with a national market research firm to conduct scientific, defensible community surveys (300–1,000 responses). Surveys are offered in multiple languages and designed to achieve high response rates and demographic representation. Confluence highlighted a robust engagement framework including: 1) A steering committee throughout the process, 2) Joint workshops with City Council and Planning Commission, 3) Public visioning sessions, listening sessions, special events, youth workshops, and a downtown charrette, and 4) Online engagement tools and branded outreach materials. The team reviewed major plan elements: 1) Future Land Use–scenario development based on data, community preferences, and updated zoning categories, 2) Housing–evaluation of local housing preferences, missing-middle opportunities, and reference to Blair’s recent housing studies and project activity, 3) Downtown Planning – preparing for reduced truck traffic, streetscape improvements, bike/ped access, amenities, safety upgrades, and redevelopment concepts, 4) Infrastructure & Utilities–assessment of water, sewer, drainage, and long-term capital needs, 5) Growth Management & Phasing – identification of Tier 1, 2, and 3 growth areas based on infrastructure availability and annexation feasibility, 6) Transportation Planning–connectivity, multimodal planning, and alignment with SS4A, 7) Annexation Strategy–policy-driven, data-based approach to evaluating service capacity and fiscal impacts, and 8) Redevelopment Areas–tools to support reinvestment, including micro-TIF for infill housing where appropriate. Confluence presented examples from Ashland, Grimes (IA), Springfield (NE), and others, highlighting their ability to create actionable, implementable plans supported by digital tools and community engagement. They emphasized their strengths in partnerships, locally grounded visioning, and fiscally responsible planning practices.

Agenda Item #6 – Public Question and Answer session to allow community feedback and questions.

Agenda Item #7 – Intermission - A brief break will be taken prior to the next Presentation.

Agenda Item #8 – Proposal Presentation for City of Blair Comprehensive Plan by JEO Consulting Group, Inc., 11213 Davenport Street, Suite 200, Omaha, NE 68154. The consulting team from JEO Consulting Group and WSP presented their proposed approach for developing the City of Blair’s Comprehensive Plan. Team members included Alyssa Vaughan (Project Manager & Engagement Lead), Kristen Ohnoutka (Lead Planner), and Tim Adams (Transportation Lead & SS4A Integration Specialist). The presenters identified Blair’s primary needs as creating a community-driven plan, preparing for future growth, and investing strategically in long-term development. The team emphasized maintaining trusted partnerships, utilizing local and regional expertise, and holding consistent check-ins throughout the project from kickoff through implementation. Their key plan components include: 1) Strong community engagement, 2) Statistically valid surveys, 3) Verified data analysis, 4) Goal setting and strategic growth planning, and 5) Integration with Safe Streets for All (SS4A) initiatives. The team outlined a multi-layered engagement process involving: 1) City leadership workshops and regular updates, 2) Pop-up events, open houses, and focus groups, 3) Use of “Penny the Engagement Van” to bring engagement directly into the community, and 4) Focus groups addressing transportation/SS4A, downtown revitalization, parks and recreation, city facilities, and economic development A previous example from Tranquility Park was

presented demonstrating successful survey outreach (1,366 responses). Their plan will include a comprehensive data inventory and existing conditions review covering: 1) Population projections and demographics, 2) Existing and future land use, 3) Transportation networks and safety needs, 4) Housing, parks, economic development, and community facilities and 5) Infrastructure and utilities capacity. The consultants highlighted that Blair would need 500+ new housing units, improved economic alignment between services and population, and strategies for infrastructure investment despite a limited tax base. The team discussed their structured process for setting community-aligned goals, project prioritization, and feasibility assessment. Population growth scenarios, including 3% and 10% projections through 2050, were presented. JEO/WSP outlined capabilities in 1) Travel demand modeling, 2) Assessing safety in coordination with SS4A, 3) Integrating multimodal needs (drivers, pedestrians, cyclists, transit users), 4) Applying “Complete Streets” design principles, and 5) Ensuring compliance with FHWA and NDOT standards and aligning projects with future funding opportunities. Examples of SS4A experience were provided, including Vision Zero initiatives in Omaha and Lincoln. The presenters concluded by emphasizing: 1) Their trusted partnership approach, 2) Strong commitment to engagement, and 3) Dedication to supporting Blair’s strategic and sustainable growth.

Agenda Item #9 – Public Question and Answer session to allow community feedback and questions.

Agenda Item #10 – Intermission - A brief break will be taken prior to the next Presentation.

Agenda Item #11 – Proposal Presentation for City of Blair Comprehensive Plan by Olsson, 2111 S. 67th Street, Suite 200, Omaha, Nebraska 68106. Representatives from Olsson delivered a presentation outlining their approach to developing a Comprehensive Plan for the City of Blair. The project team introduced included specialists in community facilities, infrastructure, transportation, and planning. Olsson identified Blair as a regional employment center with untapped residential and commercial potential. The city is well-positioned to align growth with its community identity. The key strengths noted included strong industry, job base, and transportation access. Opportunities to address include: 1) Housing needs, 2) Downtown activity and vitality and 3) Daily-life amenities for residents. Topics of interest highlighted: 1) Resource recovery, 2) Equitable housing, 3) Multimodal transportation improvements, 4) Downtown reroute and bypass planning and 5) Developable land and floodplain resilience. Olsson emphasized a people-first, implementation-focused planning process. Their engagement strategy includes: 1) Workshops, open houses, charrettes, 2) Focus groups and pop-up events, 3) Elected official work sessions, 4) Engagement ambassadors, 5) A branded project website, surveys, and social media, and 6) Interactive tools such as community mapping. The team stressed their ability to manage difficult conversations and ensure inclusive, accessible engagement. Olsson described a market-driven approach, analyzing: 1) Housing, retail, office, and industrial needs, 2) Economic development conditions, 3) Existing and potential corridors and districts and 4) Livability and long-term sustainability. The firm highlighted its integrated capabilities in 1) Water, sewer, stormwater, 2) Transportation and safety, 3) Energy and resilience and 4) Capital planning and alignment. They noted that infrastructure serves as the backbone of the plan and shared examples of work in Bellevue, NE; West Plains, MO; and Fort Collins, CO. Olsson stated their goal is to produce an actionable, day-to-day usable plan grounded in community vision. They emphasized producing clear, specific recommendations supported by robust public input. The presentation concluded with questions for city leaders regarding criteria for selecting the right planning partner, defining success for the plan, underrepresented voices in prior efforts, desired or concerning development types in the next 5–10 years, and insights planning teams should better understand about Blair. Olsson expressed their commitment to delivering a consensus-built, vision-aligned guidebook for Blair’s future.

Agenda Item #12 – Public Question and Answer session to allow community feedback and questions.

Agenda Item #13 – City Administrator Closing Remarks and Outline of Next Steps. City Administrator Green thanked the members of the public and the Planning Commission for being in attendance. All presentations will be made available online for public review. On April 14, the City Council will hold a public hearing to hear comments from the community, followed by an agenda item to select the firm to complete the Comprehensive Plan. He emphasized that hearing the public’s voice is one of the most important parts of this process.

Agenda Item #14 – Motion by Gary Banner, second by Kent Long to adjourn the meeting 9:00 p.m. Council members voted as follows: Gary Banner: Yea, Brent Clark: Yea, Kirk Highfill: Yea, James Letcher: Absent, Kent Long: Yea, Rick Paulsen: Absent, Kevin Willis: Absent, Frank Wolff: Yea. All Council members voted: Yea: 5, Nay: 0, Absent: 3. Mayor Rump declared the motion carried.

Melinda K. Rump, Mayor

ATTEST:

Brenda Wheeler, City Clerk

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